

## Into the Deep Dark Night

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/34299112) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/34299112>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Red Robin (Comics)</a> , <a href="#">Batman - All Media Types</a> , <a href="#">Slavic Mythology &amp; Folklore</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Tim Drake &amp; Jason Todd</a>
Character:	<a href="#">Tim Drake</a> , <a href="#">Ra's al Ghul</a> , <a href="#">various ninja</a> , <a href="#">Jason Todd</a> , <a href="#">Dick Grayson</a> , <a href="#">Bruce Wayne</a> , <a href="#">Damian Wayne</a> , <a href="#">Barbara Gordon - Mentioned</a> , <a href="#">Kon-El</a> , <a href="#">Conner Kent</a> , <a href="#">Bart Allen</a> , <a href="#">Cassie Sandsmark</a> , <a href="#">Lex Luthor</a> , <a href="#">John Constantine</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Other Additional Tags to Be Added</a> , <a href="#">Rusalka (Water Spirit)</a> , <a href="#">Temporary Character Death</a> , <a href="#">Tim Drake-centric</a> , <a href="#">Tim Drake Needs a Hug</a> , <a href="#">Tim Drake is Red Robin</a> , <a href="#">Tim Drake Angst</a> , <a href="#">BAMF Tim Drake</a> , <a href="#">Tim Drake is Not Okay</a> , <a href="#">Rusalka Tim Drake</a> , <a href="#">Tim Drake is not human</a> , <a href="#">Good Older Sibling Jason Todd</a> , <a href="#">Protective Jason Todd</a> , <a href="#">Jason Todd is Red Hood</a> , <a href="#">Good Sibling Jason Todd</a> , <a href="#">Tim Drake Has Issues</a> , <a href="#">Metahuman Tim Drake</a> , <a href="#">Kinda?</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of <a href="#">Tim Drake: Myth and Legend</a> , Part 75 of <a href="#">Tim Drake AU's</a>
Collections:	<a href="#">Lady Owl's Extras Library</a> , <a href="#">Elrics fic recs</a> , <a href="#">S.T.I.L.L.</a> , <a href="#">will reread</a> , <a href="#">Instant Favorites</a> , <a href="#">Leymonaide fic recs</a> , <a href="#">An1m4sh's Favourites</a> , <a href="#">Bid's Fav Creatcher Fics</a>
Stats:	Published: 2021-10-05 Completed: 2022-01-11 Chapters: 15/15 Words: 14896

## Into the Deep Dark Night

by [siren\\_of\\_the\\_ocean](#)

### Summary

Timothy Jackson Drake drowns in Gotham Bay with not a bang, but a whimper.

Luckily...or not, Gotham isn't quite ready to give him up yet.

"Spirits of children and women drowned, my child. They live in the ponds that glisten like tar. The Rusalka."

### Notes

OK. So. Rusalka as far as I could tell, the stories differ based on region. But it's fairly universal that its women and children. Some regions have them as benevolent and others as malicious so I'm gonna frame Tim as...neutral, basically. Morally grey. At least later on in the story.

Either way, I took some descriptors from some areas and others from others. The cloak of mist. The claws from areas that say the Rusalka are terribly ugly and some other hints. I did, however, take some artistic liberties.

I hope this does the whole concept justice and that you guys enjoy the story. Let me know if I got anything wrong with the folklore.

Updates are gonna be on Tuesdays every week.

## What is it like? Dying?

The sad reality of being a vigilante, is that it draws you closer and closer to the realization of your own mortality. Every moment you live, every night you go out and every second during a crisis, is a moment where you're increasingly aware of the fact that you could die at that exact moment.

And there's no avoiding it.

Every vigilante worth their salt knows that every moment they live is borrowed time. Tim's seen it time and again. Jason Todd. Damian. Dick. Bruce. Everyone's died at least once.

There's just no avoiding the gnawing realization that your life could end at any moment.

But Tim also thought that he'd go out with a bang. Whether literal or metaphorical.

This just...wasn't what he had expected.

Dangling over the calm waters of the calm Gotham Bay, only held above the frigid blue by a stretch of rope and a villain's mercy.

This wasn't how he ever expected to go.

Tim started the night quietly. A patrol over the Gotham area, watching the gangs and keeping an eye out for anything flashy. A normal night, by his standards. He just didn't expect to be taken off guard by ninjas.

Ninjas that could have only come from one person.

Ra's al Ghul.

Now, there are various reasons for Ra's to want him dead. But this? This wasn't just Ra's wanting Tim dead. This was a statement. To Bruce or to Tim, Tim isn't quite sure yet.

But what he does know is that this is happening.

He's dangling over Gotham Bay with nothing but Ra's mercy to spare him. The moment Ra's gives the order, he's going to fall into that water. The same water where mob bosses and Mafia families regularly "take care of" people.

How many people have died in the exact same way Tim is going to?

He doesn't want to know.

"Now, Detective" Ra's purrs, voice leaking through a speaker in one of the ninjas' hands. As if he

couldn't be bothered to come to Tim's execution himself. Though Tim knows he's watching. He knows he is.

"We seem to be at a stalemate. An eye for an eye, as many say, makes the whole world blind. You have something that I want, Timothy. And I currently have something you want" Ra's threatens, one of his ninjas laying a knife on the rope above Tim's head.

Making it clear what exactly Ra's has.

But Tim's always been stubborn.

There has to be a way out of this.

No more compromising.

"What do you want, Ra's?" Tim asks, forcing his voice to be as defeated as possible, closing his eyes behind the lenses of his cowl and hoping against hope that someone is in the vicinity. Someone who could have noticed Tim going dark. Someone who could have seen something weird.

Because Tim has a plan. He does. But that doesn't mean it's a good plan.

In fact, the only plan Tim has at the moment, is to free himself and swim for it. Try to make it to the dock and fight his way out.

Tim takes a deep breath, trying to oxygenate his blood as much as possible, working his hands free as well as he can to clutch at the ropes with his fingertips.

Ready to drop at a moment's notice.

"What do I want? Well, it should be obvious, Timothy. I want an heir. And since you refused to sire one with my sister, I'm afraid the original will have to do" Ra's says, the glint of something attracting Tim's attention to another ninja, perched on the lip of the dock, the glint of a needle in their hand.

"You would give in, I'm sure. After all, even Todd saw the light after being taken in by my daughter. You'd see eventually that my way is the best way. That the Bats' way is useless and predictable.

Join me, Timothy. And we shall have forever at our fingertips"

"And what if I refuse?" Tim asks, already knowing the answer, even as he opens his eyes and steels himself for the fall.

"Then my ninjas will cut you loose" Ra's says, as if saying that he'd free Tim, instead of dropping him into the bay to drag himself out.

Tim knows better.

Steeling himself, Tim takes a chance.

There's a long gap between Tim's feet and the edge of the pier. A long enough gap that Tim isn't entirely certain he can make the jump. But the gap is small enough that there's a chance.

And isn't that funny? How Tim's life these days are just based on chance?

Tim takes another long breath, swings his feet and drops his grip on the rope.

The ninjas call out, yelling in shock as Tim's toes touch the pier just by the ninja with the syringe.

Tim reaches out, grabbing for the syringe and misjudges his momentum.

Ninja number one lashes out, striking ninja number 2 toward Tim and forcing the syringe into Tim's skin.

The plunger drops just the tiniest bit and Tim can feel an immediate impact on his system, the world going floaty and free, like it had when the Madmen had infected him with their madness.

But Tim's been taught to fight through anything and everything. So he lashes out, ripping the syringe from his skin and leaving a gash along his arm as 2 ninjas fall to the pier.

Unfortunately, there are 3 ninjas at the dock.

The last one doesn't even give Tim the courtesy of looking him in the eye, instead leaving Tim to look at the speaker they're carrying. The speaker that, without doubt, Ra's al Ghul is watching him from.

"I'd rather die" Tim spits right before whatever was in the syringe kicks in full force, knocking Tim backward fast enough that the ninja can't catch him.

Tim falls into the waters of Gotham Bay all of his own volition, under his own power.

No cut ropes.

No cement shoes.

Nothing.

But his gear weighs him down, the drug in his system making his limbs harder to control.

Timothy Jackson Drake drowns in Gotham Bay with not a bang, but a whimper. And the only person to notice, is Ra's al Ghul.



## **Back we go, to the world that was once ours**

It's cold.

That's Tim's first thought.

Cold and wet.

Did Damian throw ice water at his bed again?

Tim takes a breath and startles when he doesn't remember going to bed the previous night. Doesn't remember last night, period.

In fact, Tim isn't even sure what the last thing he remembers is. Besides that weird dream he had where Ra's drowned him.

Tim's eyes flutter open to reveal dark and wet and cold. Tim can't even see his hand in front of his face.

But his eyes blink, trying desperately to adjust. And with each blink, Tim sees more.

A rock. Some weeds. A few poles. What looks like a sunken ship.

Tim's chest constricts, breath entering his lungs quickly before he realizes that what just entered his lungs isn't breath. It's water.

That wasn't a dream.

Tim is at the bottom of Gotham Bay, floating along the ocean floor with the awareness that this shouldn't be possible.

There's a resistance to his movements, water having to move out of the way before Tim can actually move. Which makes sense, Tim thinks. For the fact that literally nothing else does.

The breath that isn't a breath leaves his lungs, whooshing past his lips and disturbing the water around his mouth

His hands raise in front of him, eyesight now adjusted alarmingly well. Tim doesn't think he should be able to see through the dark and silt and mud so easily. But he does. He can see everything.

His hands though, that's what catches his attention. They're pale. Even paler than they were before. Tim almost wants to use the descriptor "like a corpse" but he thinks that would be a bit too on the nose.

The pale skin almost glows in the moonlight filtering through the water, making the shine of his nails –No, claws – all the more apparent.

His nails are black, like the claws of a dog, pointed like the talons of a bird of prey. Ending just a little bit past his fingertips, they almost look like the fake claws people get at costume shops. But Tim knows. There's nothing fake about these. He can feel where they attach to skin and bone.

He's still in his Red Robin gear, Tim notices a moment later, weight becoming apparent on his body as he moves to stand. His cape causing even more resistance as Tim drags himself upward.

He doesn't know what's happening. Isn't sure he wants to know, really.

Breathing water with claws and skin like a corpse, Tim shivers in the cold water. But it isn't because he's cold.

"Now Timothy, don't listen to your grandmother's stories, do you hear me? They are nothing but superstition" Janet had told a younger Tim while visiting her mother in Russia.

Roza Volkova was the mother of Janet Drake. Janet had left the house and thus her country of birth when she was still young, looking for artifacts all over the world with her new husband, Jack Drake.

Tim didn't get to see her often, but when he did, Roza always told him stories about her home.

About Vasilisa the Beautiful and Baba Yaga. The firebird. Father Frost. All the stories that Janet refused to listen to when she was younger.

One of these stories, or rather, one of Roza's warnings, come to mind now, as Tim drifts.

"Be careful of the ponds Timothy, lest the Rusalka drag you down, never to be seen again" Roza had said when Tim wandered a bit too close to a nearby lake. Tim had thought it interesting. How people rationalize drownings with stories. He'd asked Roza to tell him more.

Now, Tim almost wishes that he hadn't been so curious. "Spirits of children and women drowned, my child. They live in the ponds that glisten like tar. They drag you down with them and nobody is ever seen again after that.

Some people say that they are kind. That they assist in the watering of crops and protection of water bodies. Others say that they are vengeful spirits left to roam the earth and kill those they come into contact with" Roza had explained.

"And you, grandmother?" Tim had asked, drawing her dark blue eyes to him, something like pity in her eyes.

"I think that neither people nor things can be easily divided into good and evil. Things are much more complex than that" Roza had admitted, the image of her dark eyes and wrinkled, knowing smile burnt into Tim's memory for the rest of his life.



Tim breathes again, fists clenching as his eyes close. Rusalka. The spirits of drowned children. It...It makes too much sense. And yet, no sense at all.

Tim had never truly been a believer in folklore, nor anything else, if he's being honest. He's seen too much to truly believe in something good.

But here he is, alive in a body of water the size of Gotham itself, breathing water and still alive.

Tim resolves not to think of it, reaching for the clasp of his cape and releasing it from his throat, minimizing the amount of drag he'd have to carry on the way back up to the surface.

Then, Tim pushes himself off the sandy, polluted floor of the ocean, force carrying him upward farther than it should have based on the drag.

Don't think about it, Tim.

Breaching the surface feels...wrong. Cold and dry and uncomfortable in a way that it never has before. But Tim drags himself over to the pier, clinging to the poles jutting out of the water like teeth. Waiting for the sense of wrong to pass.

It doesn't.

Tim forces himself upward, out of the water and gasps at the feeling of loss. Of weight. Like his body is trying to drag itself back into the water.

But he perseveres.

He keeps going.

Up and up and up, into the cold, dark night that somehow feels much less comforting than the cold dark water he just dragged himself out of.

## Alone in a world full of people

Tim makes it to the nest. Barely, but he does. The feeling of longing, of need, almost drags him back to his watery grave time and time again. The glint of water, dark like tar and glistening like a jewel causing a flood of need in his veins, until Tim is forced to stop and breathe. To ignore the feeling of danger and threat that he'd never felt in Gotham's streets before.

The nest isn't any more comforting. Not in the slightest.

The wide open room design makes his skin crawl and the heater that he has going makes him feel like he's being cooked alive.

He switches it off, dragging a hand over his face.

He...doesn't know what to do. Go after Ra's? Contact Bruce and reassure everyone that he's alive? He isn't even sure how he's alive in the first place!

But Ra's has to be dealt with. That's something he and his new...physiology can agree on.

But first, something, anything to relieve the crawling of his skin.

Tim weaves through his nest, dodging and ducking through places with clumsy feet, shedding layers as he goes in an attempt to throw off the feeling of wrongness, before he makes it all the way to the bathroom. Specifically the shower.

The water starts, scalding Tim's skin and making him hiss unnaturally at the temperature. The temperature that Tim knows should be comfortable. It's the same temperature that Tim set when he just got the high-tech shower. The one that he's been using for months now without problem, the temperature that was perfect just...before.

Tim hisses at the water, forcing himself through the scorching water to adjust the settings, turning the water colder and colder until he feels like he could actually stand in it. He doesn't look at the thermometer. Doesn't have to. He'd had to bypass the safety measures on the thing to get it so low. Which just tells Tim that the water is below freezing.

But it feels nice, soothing as it flows over Tim's skin, cold and wet and so so soothing.

Tim ignores it, breathing as he thinks. He never thought he'd be so aware of his breathing. Or of normal body temperature. Now, he just hopes that Babs isn't invasive enough to keep track of Tim's water temperature.

Either way, he should probably check how long he was...down there. Reassure his family and all that.

Tim removes himself from the shower with difficulty, the new claws at his fingertips making typing a whole lot harder than it used to be.

Though now that he's out of his Red Robin suit, he can tell that it's not going to be easy. Ignoring what happened.

His whole nail is pitch black, shining in the blinding lights of his nest, glinting almost like the water Tim's had to drag himself from.

Tim looks away.

"Two days?" Tim almost yells, incredulity in his voice as he stares at the date. A date two days on from what he remembers it being.

He immediately checks the files and notes on the Batcomputer, tuning into the Bat frequency on his radio as he does so, his heart in his throat as he thinks of what his family must be feeling.

Worry.

Dread.

Anxiety.

They must be wondering if it's going to be just like Jason. When they were just too late to save him. Do they even know what happened to him? Do they know about the ninjas? Do they know about Ra's?

These thoughts flit through Tim's head at superspeed as Tim waits for everything to load and come online.

But then, nothing happens.

There's no panic over the open comms.

No file with a missing vigilante alert.

Nothing.

"Welcome back, Red" Oracle's voice says over his computer "It's good to have you back" she continues, before she disconnects, apparently having said her piece.

Tim sways on his feet, swallowing bile at the back of his throat as he hears Dick laughing over the comms and Damian muttering insults.

Normal.

Blankly, Tim powers down his computer, head feeling stuffed with lead as his hands shake. Pale and still wet.

Had Babs not noticed that Tim looks like a corpse?

Had nobody noticed him missing?

Where did they think he'd gone for 2 days?

Tim swallows, forcing his thoughts to blank out, like he's meditating.

Food.

Water.

Sleep.

Everything else can wait till later.

Tim doesn't have the energy to cook. And he has no appetite either. But he orders takeout from his favorite Gotham burger joint and tries to ignore the way it tastes like ash on his tongue.

The water sliding down his throat feels like relief. It feels like a breath of fresh air as he gulps it down in unimaginable quantities.

His head feels heavy, blank as he forces himself to do normal things. Human things.

The same things that his friends and family are always harping on about.

Food. Water. Sleep.

But it's just him here now, and none of these things feel right.

He doesn't feel the pang of hunger past the forced blankness.

He doesn't feel thirsty, the urge to inhale the water much stronger than the need to drink it.

And even now, laying on his ridiculously expensive bed, Tim can't help but think that he'd be much happier at the bottom of the bay.

The sheets scratch at his skin, leaving him feeling jittery and uncertain of how to stop it.

The pillow feels too soft and yet too hard. Just. Not right.

His bed feels real. In the worst way possible.

Tim swallows, forcing his thoughts to blank again as best he can as he closes his eyes.

Trying desperately not to think about the fact that he can feel air leaving his throat, in the same way that he couldn't feel water. Trying not to think of the fact that he'd been so much more comfortable floating just above the bottom of the ocean floor.

## Where even is home?

Tim doesn't know what to think. He can't sleep, can't fall into the same peaceful darkness that he dragged himself from.

But his mind won't let him sleep and his body won't let him rest.

Now Tim's used to insomnia, he's a Bat after all. But this is different in a way that Tim can't explain.

He just...can't explain why he can't sleep.

Closing his eyes once again, Tim takes a breath and almost winces at the grating feeling in his throat. Relax. Let your mind drift off into unconsciousness. Don't think about anything. Just sleep.

Nothing happens.

Tim huffs in frustration, throwing the expensive sleets off of his body to stand and shake his hands out, thinking that, if he isn't going to bed, he might as well just go do a patrol.

Right?

It isn't like he can die twice in a row.

So Tim gathers himself up, dragging his body through the motions of getting ready, slipping the Red Rbin suit over his skin and shivering at the feeling of the still damp fabric.

It shouldn't be a comfortable as it is, being the exact suit that likely caused his death.

But it slips onto his skin like cold, dark water, the crawling over Tim's skin settling as the fabric rests against it.

Cold and wet and shimmering like the surface of a lake...

Tim tears his eyes away from the glittering, dark fabric and takes a deep breath, resting his clawed fingertips against his palms.

Chinatown, Crime Alley and the Diamond District. A relatively short patrol route and nothing close to the docks. Not close enough to get a glimpse at the glittering water that Tim feels so drawn to.

The plan is flawless.

But Tim really should know better.

No plan is without flaw.

Tim ends up next to the water, staring down at the glittering surface and rippling tiny waves with eyes that feel just as dark as the water itself.

The water calls to him. But not in a way that Tim considers menacing at all. Instead, the waters call to him like the memory of Dick's hug, that night at the circus. Shrouded in darkness and death, but so so comfortable. So natural.

Tim takes a step forward and almost falters when the waves seem to still, as if reacting to him. A shiver runs down his spine. The feeling that someone is watching him.

"You can come out, you know?" Tim calls out, knowing, by some force, that someone is near. That someone is close by. That someone is near his - no – the lake.

Jason steps out of the shadows of the surrounding warehouses, his dark red helmet glinting in the early light rays of the rising sun and causing Tim's clawed fingers to twitch.

"You planning on taking a dip?" Jason asks, voice laced with hesitance, as if he's being careful around Tim for some reason.

Tim glances down at the water again and marvels at the way that you can't even see the cape fluttering in the water unless you look for it.

"No" Tim answers, not saying that he already had taken a dip and that it had ended in tragedy. Not that anyone knew. Except maybe for Ra's.

Which should be dealt with soon.

"You're staring at the bay like it's some long-lost lover, Red. I think I have reason to be concerned" Jason says, still quiet and hesitant.

Tim shakes his head, watching dark strands, now even darker if Tim isn't lying to himself, wave in his line of sight.

"Just thinking about some old stories my Grandmother told me" Tim half-lies, sitting down at the edge of the pier, legs dangling over the edge and kicking just above the surface of the water.

He barely sees Jason sit down next to him, only watching the glint of red out of the corner of his eyes.

"What kind of stories?" Jason asks.

"You know how in Crime Alley, you have the stories about the Bat. How he isn't human. Can't be and can't possibly be?" Tim asks, watching Jason nod in understanding. Knowing how some people still believe Batman to be a shadow, a spirit, a vengeful victim of some sort.

“What does that have to do with the bay?” Jason asks when Tim doesn’t elaborate further.

“I was just thinking” Tim answers, vague and knowing.

Jason hums in understanding.

“Well. Don’t spend too much time thinking, Red. You’ll get lost in that brain of yours” Jason says, resting a hand on Tim’s shoulder and giving his hair a shake with his other hand.

Just like before.

Like nothing’s changed at all.

Like nothing’s changed. At all.

And that...that’s something Tim hasn’t thought of before.

Nothing’s changed.

His suit looks like he’s added claws, his skin isn’t much paler than it was before and it isn’t like he didn’t have sleeping problems before this.

The fact that he kinda wants to jump into the bay? Well Damian tends to attack from under furniture.

And the fact that he kinda wants to sleep floating in the bottom of the bay? Well, Dick’s fallen asleep in chandeliers.

He came back from the dead, but then so has Jason.

He may or may not have the urge to drag people underwater? Cass has to fight her training to kill every single day.

Nothing’s really changed.

Nothing at all.



## Ra's

Ra's was always going to track him down. That was just always going to happen.

The moment Tim reappeared, this was known. There was no way that Ra's was ever going to leave him alone after what happened.

Tim was just hoping for a bit more time.

Unfortunately, his luck seems to have died along with him.

It's ninjas again. Because why would it be anything but? It's not like the last batch killed him or anything.

The ninjas don't care about Tim's apprehension though. Don't care that Tim wants to hiss and scream at them any time they get near the surface of the river that they cornered Tim at.

They don't care that Tim's fingers itch to grab onto flesh.

They don't care that Tim can feel the shiver at his back, like the time he was fighting Ra's.

They don't know or care that he's in complete, perfect control.

And that they might just become prey.

But Tim restrains himself. Doesn't fall back into dark waters to grab at their ankles or swipe at their faces with his claws.

He stands stock-still.

And waits.

Because the ninjas aren't attacking him. They're waiting for something.

Or rather, someone.

Ra's appears with a swirl of his cape, glittering dark green in the night almost like Damian's Robin costume does.

And isn't it ironic that the little monster mimics his upbringing, even when trying to shed it?

Tim's eyes follow Ra's shape, tracking his movement with his eyes and resisting the clench of his hands.

No need to give Ra's any more ammunition than he already has.

"Well, Detective" Ra's drawls, eyes looking Tim over "You seem to be in better health than I expected"

Tim doesn't rise to the bait, raising an eyebrow at Ra's and waiting for Ra's to tell Tim everything he knows. Or at least, what he thinks he knows.

"Very clever, I must admit" Ra's relinquishes, shoulders relaxing as if he's speaking to a friend or family member. Not an enemy that's brought him down once before.

"Using the underground tunnels and the natural underwater cave system to escape. I assume someone must have assisted you with that? As you were..." Ra's smirks "Compromised. Last I saw"

Underwater cave system?

How much exactly does Ra's know about Gotham?

How many entrances does he know about that Bruce doesn't even?

Tim breathes.

"I would have appreciated some help. But no. I got out under my own power," Tim says, speaking as he thinks of an explanation "Luckily for me, Bruce trains us in toxin resistance. And, of course, growing up in Gotham also helped.

More than that though, I learned my lesson after the Council of spiders.

You can't always trust someone will be there" Tim bullshits, knowing that what he's saying makes logical sense.

But that isn't what happened.

Not that Ra's needs to know that.

Ra's hesitates, visibly thinking through Tim's statement.

No alternative sources.

No witnesses.

No way any of the Bats knew.

Tim specifically formulated it this way. No family involved. No civilians involved. Nobody that could back up Tim's story but himself.

Luckily, Ra's has no choice but to accept the explanation given.

After all, what's the other choice?

That Tim died and came back with no outside help?

Tim stands his ground and breathes, feeling something building at his back, something like tension.

Like the river itself is waiting to see what happens.

"Hm. Impressive" Ra's allows, smirking at Tim with visible teeth. A display of aggression and superiority.

Tim nods at him, tilting his head in question. Asking with his body language along "Are we done here? I have things to do"

Ra's has always hated it when Tim does that. And this time is no different.

"I shall take my leave then, Timothy. But please. Do consider my offer. As next time, I will not be nearly as...forgiving" Ra's says, swirling his cape in a grand gesture and indicating to all of the ninjas to leave.

They vacate immediately. And if Tim were anyone else. He wouldn't have been able to see them scuttling through the shadows, watching their master with beady eyes.

But the crawling sensation on Tim's back doesn't leave.

There's still someone here.

"Ra's...if you left another ninja to keep an eye on me...This one is going to lose more than just their hair!" Tim calls out, smiling at the memory of the time Tim had caught one of the ninja with Nair. It was quite an enjoyable experience. For him at least.

"Holy...Did you really do that?" Jason's voice asks, voice laced with tense laughter. He appears from behind a building, red helmet hidden surprisingly well between the shadows.

Tim relaxes then, at the realization that it's just Jason left, and not a ninja.

"Yup. Decided to get some revenge. Even if it had to be on the nameless assassin Ra's decided to sacrifice" Tim answers, smiling, before he turns to face the water.

Jason tilts his head, as if that sentence wasn't right. "He regularly sends ninja after you?" Jason asks a moment later when Tim doesn't speak further.

Tim snorts this time, simply because that questions deserves it "He stalks me almost as badly as I stalked Batman and Robin as a kid" Tim answers, not seeing Jason's domino flash green for a moment. Too enraptured in staring out at the river.

"He stalks you?" Jason demands. And Tim almost laughs.

"Did you not hear this whole conversation? He tried to drown me, Hood" Tim says, ignoring the reality that there was no Try involved.

Jason's silent for a moment "That's some fucked up shit, Red" he says later, no joking in his voice "And the fact that you had to get out alone? I don't like that either"

Tim almost startles at the words, spoken plainly and without emotion. Like fact rather than the opinion it is.

"Yeah. Well. Guess we both learned our lesson"

## The caves

Ra's had mentioned underwater caves.

There was no way that Tim wasn't going to investigate them.

But Tim is...hesitant. He'd managed to drag himself out of the water once. Had managed to tear himself from the feeling of safety and freedom once. Right after.

But.

He doesn't know If he can do it again.

Either way, though. Someone has to check the underwater passages. And Tim is, obviously, the most adept choice.

It has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that Tim wishes he could feel as safe and happy in his actual house as he did at the bottom of a river.

Nothing at all to do with the fact that he hasn't slept a wink in days.

Absolutely nothing.

But when Tim sees the glittering, dark waters and feels the chill up his spine, this time comforting and heavy, like a blanket, he pulls out a rebreather.

He may not need it. But he also does not need Barbara spotting him going into the river without one. And he definitely doesn't need Jason to spot him going in without one either.

Jason...well. That's a whole other topic of discussion.

After that unfortunate encounter with Ra's, Jason's been extending his patrol route to overlap with Tim's, checking in with him at least once a night and steering him away from waterways as he goes.

Because Tim, no matter how hard he fights, always ends up near the Gotham bay.

And when they do stop at a water source, Jason watches him, sits with him and stays quiet. Like he knows something more is going on but won't ask.

And Tim isn't sure how to feel about Jason Todd.

The boy he idolized. The boy that died. The man that came back. The man that tried to kill him. The only Bat that noticed something off.

It's not something Tim ever expected.

But either way, Tim is sure that if Jason sees Tim going into the water without a rebreather, Jason might actually jump in to save him.

And Tim does not have the energy to deal with that kind of fallout today.

So he fixes the rebreather over his lips, takes a breath for show and ducks his head under the murky water of Gotham river.

As soon as he's sure that he's no longer visible under the dark, reflective waters at the surface, Tim frantically reaches for his rebreather and rips it out of his mouth, skin pricking in delight at the feeling of weight and presence around him. The weight of the water almost making Tim giddy as he takes in a lungful of water.

The scratching in his throat dies down as the water flows down his airway, filling his lungs and making Tim's every nerve sing with pure contentment.

He'd avoided the water for so long. So incredibly long.

And now? He feels at home, safe and happy in a way that he doesn't at the surface, that he hasn't felt in a long time.

He closes his eyes. Just for a moment. Just to take it in, to savor and memorize it.

Then, purpose floods his veins and Tim smiles.

The caves are as extensive as Ra's implied.

It doesn't take Tim long to find not one but two entrances, carved from rock and stone underneath Gotham like gaping holes, darker still against the dark limestone they've been carved from.

And from there, Tim just follows the caves.

There are so many of them. Some offshoots lead further inland. Others lead out into the bay. Still others lead to the separate islands that Gotham calls part of itself. Arkham and Bristol.

Tim even finds a cave that he thinks might end up in the Batcave somewhere.

It's like a commuter's system. Completely underwater. Leading anywhere Tim would possibly want to go.

There are even sections that look like rooms, hollowed out into circles and chambers, some with air

pockets, some without.

Exploring, Tim finds a few traps scattered around the way, presumably set up by Ra's. Tim disables those easily, setting his own in their stead and relishing at the idea of Ra's expression when he realises he lost the control of this beautiful place.

Because this is his now.

Tim can feel it in his veins.

His.

Tim makes sure to replace the rebreather on his lips before he surfaces, sealing a breath of air from the tunnels into his lungs.

And he's very glad he took that precaution when he surfaces.

"Um. Tim?" Dick's voice asks from around the pier, Damian standing at his side and Bruce hovering over them both as Jason huffs at them.

"I told you. He took a rebreather and went into the tunnels" Jason says, voice heavily annoyed. Then, he turns to face Tim.

"Idiots thought I'd killed you and dumped the body" Jason explains.

Tim almost laughs. After all, Tim and Jason have been getting along...fairly well. At least since Tim took that swim.

"Nah. Ra's mentioned some underwater caves when I last met him. Wondered if maybe they give access to Gotham and maybe that's one of the ways he gets ninjas in" Tim explains, ignoring Damian's grumbles.

"Glad I did, too" Tim says, speaking right over the gremlin to lift the handful of wires and blades and explosives he'd removed from around the caves "Cause that's one less ninja to worry about in the future"

The gremlin stops grumbling after that, Dick and Bruce eyeing the traps with caution.

Which, fair. They're traps from the league of assassins. Tim can understand their hesitance.

"Any more of them down there?" Jason asks, reaching out a hand for the traps, which Tim hands over easily.

Jason huffs, though, like that isn't what he wanted.

"The water's below freezing, you idiot. Give me your hand before you freeze" Jason explains,

reaching out a hand again.

This time, Tim hesitates.

He knows the water is below freezing. It's comfortable. The water feels like a blanket around him, present and heavy.

But Jason keeps his hand out and Tim can't refuse without drawing suspicion.

He places his abnormally cold hand in Jason's abnormally warm one and allows the man to pull him up, out of the water as he mutters "Fucking freezing. Bring a freeze suit the next time you decide to go diving in winter"



# Home

Tim thought that after exploring the tunnels, he'd be better, having satisfied some sort of instinct within him.

He was wrong.

So incredibly wrong.

In fact, Tim thinks, staring again at glittering dark waters, it may even have gotten worse.

The water calls to him now, like Ace calls to Damian when he's been gone too long, howling and whining with wide, pleading eyes.

Tim feels like he's trying to resist a chain wrapped around his heart.

And it isn't going too well for him.

He hadn't even made it the entire way to the nest this time. Jason had tried, insisting on accompanying him to the nest as long as he still feels like he gave Mr Freeze a hug. But Tim had resisted, skin crawling and grating in the dry air of the city as they got farther and farther away from the bay.

Jason had eventually relented when Tim's eyes started tearing, when his fingers started to twitch. Jason had looked concerned, worried. Especially since all the other Bats left shortly after Jason pulled Tim out of the bay.

"Bastards. Can't even look after their own" Jason had grumbled, making sure that he was in hearing range of at least one camera.

"Babs deserves to rip Dick a new one for that" Jason had explained after the camera had winked at them.

Now, here he is again, at the edge of the railing, only his heels holding him on semi-solid ground, with his entire being lashing out at him, begging him to take just one step forward, to sink into the silt at the bottom and lay there for just a little while.

Maybe even take someone with him. Like Ra's.

Of course, Tim still sees Ra's as a threat. He would be an idiot not to.

But Tim resists the urge to hunt him down and leave him in the caves without some form of breathing apparatus.

Tim resists.

But it takes all the willpower that he has left.

This bay, the rivers and docks and all of the interconnected water ways on Gotham. They're all his now. They're his home. They're a part of him in a very literal sense, their waters having filled his lungs more than once now.

They're where he needs to be.

And resisting that temptation just isn't in Tim's strength at the moment.

He'd shut off all the cameras in the vicinity earlier, burned all the wires that might even possibly be connected to a listening or recording device. Had drowned every satellite dish that he could get his hands on.

It makes the bottom of the cave glitter like the surface of Mars.

The whole area here, a tiny pond in the middle of Robinson Park, is clean.

The tiny pond is deceptive. Tim remembers seeing it as a child. Feeding the ducks lettuce because bread is bad for them. Remembers being thrown into it as Robin during a fight with Poison Ivy. Remembers fighting the sinking weight because the pond was deeper than he, or anyone else, had imagined.

It isn't a pond.

It's a cave mouth, leading to the rest of the tunnels. Like the gaping maw of a giant monster, lurking just under the surface.

Tim just hadn't been able to resist now.

He'd given up on resisting.

The caves, the bay, the ponds. They're all his now. They're his home.

The nest had virtually become defunct.

Tim had grabbed his most important things, things that wouldn't be damaged underwater and some that would survive a short trip.

After all, what's home without all his little comforts?

So Tim had grabbed a completely waterproof container from the cave, using one of the tunnels to

gain entry without anyone's knowledge. He'd grabbed the container and stuffed it with things that aren't really meant to go underwater.

His coffee machine, his computer, his phone, a couple of lights. And a few other things that he'd just like to keep dry. A few blankets. Pillows. Clothes.

He'd taken all of that, in the container, all of his important possessions, and dropped down into the water. The case is heavy in his hands, trying to sink rather than float like the air inside of it should. But Tim's a vigilante. The case doesn't drag him down. And the water doesn't seem to hinder his progress at all.

He takes his possessions to the largest cavern he's found so far, a room not unlike the Batcave, but also more than half underwater. It's large. Damp. With sharp stalagmites dropping from the ceiling.

It's perfect

The blankets go onto the smooth rocks, forming something like a blanket pile or nest on the stone, immediately becoming damp when they come into contact with the wet stones.

The coffee machine, now without power, which is something that Tim hadn't considered, settles onto one of the higher, drier ledges of the cave, along with his computer, also without power and his cell phone that he can't charge.

But that's a later Tim problem.

Right now, this whole space, with the water and the ledges and the blankets and everything else?

It feels more like home than Tim's ever felt.

More home than an empty mausoleum of a mansion.

More home than Wayne manor, always more home to others than it was to him.

More home than the nest, a place more for a vigilante than a human.

It's...It's home now.

It's his home.

## Something's wrong

“I’m telling you. Something’s off. You need to watch him”

“And why should we trust you, huh? You tried to kill him!”

“And now I’m telling you that I’m concerned. Me. Doesn’t that tell you something?”

Bar pauses, going still next to Kon, staring at the invader of the tower. The person that’s broken in twice now.

Once to hurt one of their own and now to...what? Give them a warning? About the same kid he tried to beat to death?

“Why should we trust you?” Cassie asks, voice calm, calculated and hard. But Kon doesn’t see their fearless leader at the moment. There’s doubt in her eyes. But not doubt at Jason’s statement. There’s doubt in something else.

“The kid stares at any kind of water like he wants to drown in it. And I’m not exaggerating” Jason says, eyes locked on Kon’s, like he knows that Kon would do anything and believe anything if it meant even a chance of keeping Tim safe.

They all would.

But Kon knows that he’s the weak point here. He’s the one that’s closest to believing Jason at face value.

Kon’s never taken well to threats directed at Tim. Cassie has always been more pragmatic in that sense, understanding that while Tim may be human, he’s far from fragile. But Kon was created with superpowers. He doesn’t know when it’s like to be human like Cassie does. All he knows is that Tim is human. And that, 90% of the time, means fragile.

Not that he thinks Tim is fragile. Oh no. Tim would kryptonite punch him for even thinking it. But Kon understands that between the Titans, Tim’s the one that’s most likely to get hurt. Or worse.

He may have outlived Kon and even Bart. But he isn’t bulletproof. He doesn’t have superfast healing.

All Tim has is a cape and a hope.

“Tim’s not suicidal” Bart automatically defends, eyes wide and, if you didn’t know him, stern.

But all the Titans know that they should watch Tim. Closely.

After that whole debacle with the future Titans.

After Tim holding a gun to his head with the intention of pulling the trigger.

They all know.

Jason scoffs like he knows Bart is lying “The explain to me why the kid fought Ra’s al Ghul alone. You were in town. All of you. And yet he dislocated his shoulder and got thrown out a window. For what?” Jason sneers “To make a fucking point. I don’t exactly call that sane”

Kon’s breath stutters in his chest, ribs squeezing in shock.

He...didn’t know that.

“And then? Well of course Ra’s comes after him again! And this time, there’s nobody to catch him!” Jason roars, eyes glinting luminous green.

He stops. Takes a breath. Leaves the Titans to think.

“Is he OK?” Kon asks a moment later, eyes clenched tightly shut at the anticipation of bad news.

“There’s nobody to catch him” usually only means one of two things.

Either Jason’s here to invite them to a hospital...or to a funeral.

The fact that Jason’s trying to convince them to watch Tim implies that he’s alright. Alive and probably even back up and running. But with Tim, that doesn’t mean much.

Kon’s seen Tim go out with the literal plague.

“He’s alive. For now” Jason says, hesitating “His nest is empty. He hasn’t been there in weeks. Saw him dragging some shit into town, think he might be creating new safehouses. But his main house, his apartment and all that? Hasn’t been there in weeks. I have no idea where he sleeps. Or eats, in fact. I haven’t seen him eat once while we patrolled together”

“He doesn’t like to eat during patrols. Says that he should be paying attention” Kon says back, forcing the words past the twisting in his stomach.

“And if he were only doing patrols like he used to, I wouldn’t be so worried about that” Jason shoots back.

“He’s been patrolling 12 hours a day. Late afternoon to late morning. Generally 6 to 6. Quit at Wayne Industries too, news kicked up a fuss about it a few weeks ago. Said he “needed more time to himself”” Jason explains, breath leaving his chest in heaving lungfulls.

Kon’s eyes widen and Jason seems to sense the uncertainty in them. The mask over the Young

Justice team cracking.

“But you already know you should watch him” Jason observes, green eyes dimming slightly with realization. “You just didn’t know you should be watching him right now” he guesses.

Kon’s heartbeat stutters. He glances up, meeting Jason’s eyes. And resolve fills his veins.

“I’ll keep an ear on him” Kon says, using the inside joke Tim founded about Kon’s super hearing. But he isn’t joking.

“I’ll invite him somewhere. Frame it as a team bonding activity for the original members of Young Justice. Maybe get Greta, Anita and Cissie in on it, too” Cassie says, eyes flickering, like she’s creating a plan.

Even Bart flickers, corporeal form flickering in and out around the edges in a way that tells Kon that he is ready to GO if there’s even the slightest hint of something in Gotham.

Jason eyes them slowly, then. Eyes dragging over them. Evaluating.

“Keep an eye on the kid, kids. I don’t want any more dead Robins” he says, turning his back on them when he’s sure they’ve taken his warning to heart.

“Hey. Hood!” Bart calls out when Jason reaches the door, causing Jason to turn around and raise an eyebrow at him. “Thanks for the warning. But if you ever go after our Rob again, you’ll realise why physicists are so scared of speedsters” Bart proclaims, eyes flashing dangerously bright with inner lightning.

Jason just raises an eyebrow further and smirks “I’d love to see you try, little man”

## Titans Together!

“Who invited the Titans?” Tim demands, storming into the Batcave with his friends short on his heels.

His friends, who have not left his side since early this afternoon, when he went out on patrol.

Which presents a myriad of questions and problems.

Firstly, when did they get to Gotham?

Secondly, why did they come to Gotham?

Thirdly, who gave them permission to come to Gotham?

And most importantly, why are they being so annoying?

Tim hasn't seen either Kon or Bart this insistent since they broke into Gotham during No Man's Land. Which...is a whole other thing than just normal Gotham things.

Tim did, however, have a moment of panic when Kon appeared, thinking that maybe Kon had heard his heart stop a few weeks ago and had been...waiting.

Either way, Tim does not want them here at the moment. Not with everything still so new. Not with how well they know him.

They'll know something's wrong.

“They requested clearing for a “Young Justice get together”” Bruce says, using actual finger quotes in a move that makes Tim cringe.

“Never do that again” Tim says, turning to Bruce with a pointed finger.

“The finger quotes or the acceptance of your friends' request?” Bruce asks with a smirk.

Tim narrows his eyes, a smile playing on his lips at the memory that really, nothing has changed. Bruce is still an asshole. Still makes Dad jokes. “The abomination you call finger quotes” Tim clarifies.

“So we get to stay? Great” Kon says, not even giving Tim time to object before he slings an arm around Tim's shoulders and starts to tug him out of the cave.

“I have Kryptonite” Tim hisses, with only the barest minimal of animalistic snarling and paranormal echo to the sound.

“You’d never use it anyway” Kon says rightly, giving up on the idea of Tim coming along willingly. Tim knows the moment that Kon starts to hunch and grasps his wrist. The princess carry.

No.

Tim twists, pulling his wrist loose from Kon’s hand and landing on his feet, automatically in a fighting pose and facing his friends with narrow eyes.

“Nowhere outside of Gotham” Tim starts, stipulating his rules.

His friends cheer like the assholes that they are, knowing that Tim won’t back out now.

“Nowhere outside of Gotham. Nowhere that I can’t get to my suit fast and nowhere near any of the skyscrapers, Kon. We all know how Bart gets with too many stairs” Tim stipulates.

His eyes twitch at the loss of his day. Because this day is done. They won’t allow him to do anything now

Which is a bummer. He had plans. Well. Maybe. Maybe they could help him out?

If they knew what his plans were, they wouldn’t be opposing to them.

Mybe. They’d even be willing to help.

Tim smiles and it feels sharper than usual. Darker. But his friends don’t seem to notice in their victory. And he doesn’t notice the supersped glance they share at the darkness in his eyes.

“But” Tim interjects, already waiting for the complaints before they even start. He holds up a hand “You all need to help me finish up what I was planning today”

“Which is?” Cassie asks hesitantly, eyes squinted suspiciously.

Good, Tim thinks, they should be suspicious.

“I wanted to prank Ra’s. Maybe bring his little empire down around his head for a bit” Tim explains, leaving the cave just as Bruce starts to protest that plan of action. Tim doesn’t pay it any attention.

Kon and Bart immediately look eager, darker expressions flitting over their faces. Cassie raises an eyebrow at him, inquisitive and Tim shrugs.

She relaxes after that, nodding her assent to the plan.

“Fine. We’ll help out. But after that, we’re having a day out” Cassie stipulates easily.



Tim nods, coughing to cover his sharp teeth and wide smile.

This will be fun.

They arrive to Nanda Parbat relatively easily, with Kon and Bart and Cassie speeding up the process tremendously as they go.

It's a desert. Not something that combines especially well with his new body, he discovers, his skin burning almost instantly as they come into contact with the dry, warm air and unfiltered sunlight. It's unpleasant, but Tim can deal with it. It isn't the first sunburn he's gotten.

Kon doesn't even seem bothered, making a joke about Tim's lack of sunlight in recent months if he's burning so quickly, leading to Bart making a joke about roasted bird that Tim resolves to never, ever, tell Jason.

But by the time they land, Tim's feeling...almost out of breath? Like the dry air isn't giving him what he needs. Like a more irritating version of what happens at the nest.

Tim resolves to get this over with as quickly as possible.

"So. Boss-man, what's the plan?" Bart asks, appearing in front of Tim directly after he lands, his hands laden with boxes. Boxes that he definitely didn't have before this whole trip. But then again. Bart's faster. They all know that.

Tim eyes the boxes with suspicion, giving Bart a side-eye until he explains "Spray-paint, glitter paint, dyes of various colours, silly string, some plastic wrap. Everything you need to prank a base full of assassins and ninjas" he explains a moment later, smirking.

Tim smiles, his head tilting to the side incredulously.

Bart is so...Bart. Tim's planning to bring the whole place down and Bart's planning to have fun while he does it.

Not that Tim can begrudge him that.

He also quite enjoys the chaos that follows, with colourful explosions overlapping real ones, silly string flying with pressurized water.

And by the time they leave, the whole place is rendered unusable.

And the next

And the next.

By the time they make it back to Gotham, Tim feels like an actual roasted bird, his skin glowing red with burns and his skin actually hot to the touch, which is...worrying. Since he's been hovering below skin temp for a while now.

But it does make it easier for Tim to convince the team to go somewhere where he won't burn any further.

"Oh. That won't be a problem. Cissie's waiting for us at that pond you love"

## Water, tinged green

Tim almost has a literal heart attack at those words.

The fact that Kon can't hear the weird hiccup his heart makes is also concerning. But less so than the words that just came out of Cassie's mouth.

"The what?" Tim demands, trying to keep his voice level.

"You know, that pond you always told us about? The one in Robinson?" Cassie asks, scoffing like she's disappointed that Tim doesn't know what she's talking about.

The whole problem is that he does.

"And why exactly are we going to Robinson while Ivy's still on the loose?" Tim demands, scrambling for an excuse, any excuse.

Bart's the one that scoffs at him this time "Come on, Tim. The sirens haven't been villains in years now. And the fact that you call her "Ivy" and not "Poison Ivy" just proves my point" he says, raising an eyebrow at Tim as if asking "so what's your real reason?"

"I just don't want to get sunburnt further" Tim says, gesturing down to his skin, still tinged more red than pink.

Kon doesn't bother refuting him like Cassie and Bart did, simply sighing and stooping in a way that Tim recognizes and hates.

He smothers down the hiss that rises in his chest and, doing that, is too late to avoid the carry that Kon picks him up into.

"I am going to kill you" Tim says, voice flat and earnest, meeting Kon's eyes and glaring at him.

The fact that Kon only smiles down at him and winks makes it all the harder to resist hissing at him.

He doesn't even look bothered when Tim knees him in the ribs. Purely on principal. Because Kon can't just think he can pick Tim up and manhandle him. No. Tim has to make a point.

But, interestingly, Tim doesn't feel the urge to grab onto Kon, to pierce flesh with claws, not that he could. Invincibility and such.

But it does make him think.

He and Jason have been spending some time together now. And he's never felt the urge to grab or

stab or drag. Not like he did with Ra's or the ninjas. Or even Damian sometimes. Because the child is an actual demon in a human body and thus happens to trigger all of Tim's urges.

Tim's eyes narrow in thought and his friends smirk with a plan, Cissie shaking her head and sighing in the background.

She hasn't seen them in a while. But that doesn't mean that they've changed. They haven't.

Cissie knows exactly what's going to happen next. Knows what it's intended to test. Jason had specifically mentioned that Tim was drawn to water.

And now? They're at the pond that Tim loves the most.

If anything's going to get him to open up about his mental health, it's this. Either that or a truth serum.

Now look. Tim wasn't paying attention, OK. He was busy marveling at the idea that he doesn't want to drown his friends. So maybe he missed the fact that they were getting closer and closer to the darker green parts of the park. And maybe, just maybe, the sing of getting closer to water was a bit too similar to the sting of sunburn.

So. It's completely justified that Tim doesn't notice the pond until he's literally thrown into it.

His skin sings. His muscles relax. And his dry throat stops. But Tim doesn't have time to relish in that at this exact moment. No sirree.

Nope. Tim has friends that still think he's human.

And they might be assholes, but Tim isn't enough of an asshole to make them think he drowned.

Well. Now. At this moment.

Tim comes up for air and glares at Kon's laughing form, eyes shifting over to Bart when he starts laughing even harder, probably at the scowl lining Tim's lips, forced there with Tim's willpower alone, even though he hasn't been more comfortable literally ever. Even Cassie's snickering.

Cissie's the only one that looks even mildly confused. Concerned, even.

"Hey Tim?" she asks, eyes affixed to Tim's.

"Yeah?" Tim asks, still trying to keep up the disgruntled act, even though he's currently comfortable and surrounded by friends.

Feeling more at home than before.

“What happened to your sunburn?” Cissie asks, eyes not moving away from Tim’s face, like they’ve been locked there.

Tim blinks, confused and then glances down to his arm, which just moments before was slightly hotter than normal person temperature and red.

Now, it’s just as pale as it as the night he dragged himself out of the water, 2 days after his death.

Tim blinks again, his surroundings this time silent as Kon, Bart and Cassie stop laughing.

He opens his mouth, ready to speak, even though he doesn’t have an explanation for this.

Maybe he could say it must not have been as bad as they thought?

Luckily, he doesn’t need to.

Unluckily, he doesn’t need to.

A green glow fills the air around them, different to Ivy’s plants, different to anything that usually appears in Gotham.

No. This is something you only see in Metropolis.

Kon goes down almost instantly, leaning onto Bart’s shoulder as Cassie steps forward, taking point.

Tim stays in the water, eyes dark and shining as Lex Luthor steps into the clearing, a slim sliver of glowing green rock in his hand and a smile on his face.

“Well, son. Isn’t it a surprise to see you here?” Lex Luthor asks, smiling smugly enough that Tim’s hand twitch on the bank of the cave, claws digging into rock.

“Why don’t we have a little chat?”

## Not much caring left to give

Tim's always been good at watching. It's all he's ever done, since a child. Watch his parents. Watch Batman and Robin. Watch Bruce and Jason and Dick. Watch Damian so that the little brat doesn't stab him again. Watch Babs and Steph and Cass and the Titans.

Which is to say, Tim's always been good at watching.

But watching without action is its own form of torture.

The Titans can't move in. Can't fight Lex. Not with Kon down.

Of course, they could fight Lex. They could, but someone would have to watch Kon. And Lex is Lex. Which is to say, he doesn't play by the rules.

Cassie would be distracted by how Kon's doing. Bart would be too lenient or too harsh in equal measure. Cissie would have to look after Kon.

And Tim's stuck in this fucking pond.

Now the thing about this pond, the thing Tim noticed after his first dip into it as Robin, is the fact that it has no bottom. Nothing to land on. Nothing to push off of.

Tim could get out. He could. But it would take time to do it in a human way.

Time that he just doesn't have around Lex Luthor.

Lex knew what he was doing. He knew that he was catching them off-guard, Tim realises. This was planned.

It makes dread bubble in Tim's gut that seems to be echoed by the pond itself, rumbling lightly under Tim's hands like the ground during a collapse.

"Now now. Don't be hasty" Lex simpers, still smirking in a way that makes Tim want to rake his claws over his face. "And don't move either, will you? I have plans, and I wouldn't want you to interfere"

The words strike a chord in Tim, an acknowledgement. A plan.

This wasn't just planned. This was orchestrated.

"You made one of my friends very unhappy. And they were happy to assist me with a plan that I already had" Lex says, smirking down at Tim and that's when Tim realises.

Ra's.

Lex and Ra's had never officially worked together before. Ra's was always more focused on Gotham and Lex on Metropolis.

But Tim and the Titans had blown up every single base that they could reach.

It would make sense for Ra's to put a hit out on them

But this is so much worse.

"Now. Al Ghul said that the birdy should die for his insolence. But I thought, as long as I'm killing one of you, why not take advantage of the situation? Free my son up to come home?" Lex asks, laughing when Cassie takes a step forward to insert herself in between Lex and Tim.

He waves the kryptonite in his hand, smirking as Kon chokes on his breath.

The kryptonite is working faster than usual, having more of an effect on Kon.

And it only gets worse when Lex uses his other hand to level a gun at Tim's head, freezing Tim in place with sheer remembered self-preservation instinct.

Tim can hear Kon stuttering something, words lost to the way Bart's vibration becomes audible, wind rushing through the clearing as Bart makes a vacuum only to fill it a moment later.

"Na, ah ah. Speedsters may be fast. And even Supers are faster than a speeding bullet. But I've got 2 birds in hand here. Do you really want to chance it?" Lex asks Bart, smirking as Cassie's fists tighten.

Because he's right.

Tim, as far as they know, is human. One bullet could mean the end for him.

And Kon's tingling greener the more they speak, leaning more heavily on Cissie, who stepped forward to support him.

They're at a disadvantage here.

Or at least, that's how it looks.

Because they have one advantage that Lex isn't aware of. That nobody's aware of.

"The bullet in the gun is, of course, Kryptonite as well. Could be used to injure Conner. Could also

be used to kill your little friend over there. Two birds, one stone” Lex starts explaining, gun still leveled at Tim in a way that makes his very insides shriek.

“Now, I don’t want to kill any of you” Lex states, countered by the way his hand is relaxed on the gun and the way that Kon’s started choking on his breath.

“But Ra’s al Ghul offered a favor and who am I to refuse such an offer?”

The gun in Lex’s hand cocks and Tim’s eyes narrow as his friends freeze.

They don’t know what to do. They’re stuck.

And so is Tim.

“I don’t think so, motherfucker!” a familiar voice calls out, a pair of feet hitting the soil in front of Lex with a thump as Tim hears the whiz of grapple guns.

Red helmet shining in the daylight.

It’s Jason.

Tim can see a streak of bright blue in the foliage, the rustle of leaves above him making him aware of Robin’s green cape. And that shadow behind Tim is definitely too dark to be natural.

It’s the Bats.

“Make a move and I will put a bullet in your head” Jason threatens, a gun coming up to mirror Lex’s, aimed directly at Lex’s head.

But that doesn’t make Lex move his gun away from Tim, only causing him to raise a brow.

“Impressive timing. But what are you going to do? Your Super is suffering, your Bird is stuck in a pond with no exit and none of the Titans will move while I still have a gun on their human” Lex challenges, smug smirk still in place.

“Shoot him and you won’t live to see whatever favor Ra’s was willing to give you” Jason threatens again, but he doesn’t move forward.

Lex smirks and it makes Tim want to grab and tear and pull.

“That wouldn’t bring your Birdy back. So you wouldn’t”

Tim sees the moment it happens. Where Lex’s eyes shine and the grip on his gun tightens.



“Besides, Batman wouldn’t let you” he says, finger tightening on the trigger as the bullet leaves the muzzle at peak velocity.

But Tim doesn’t feel pain.

At least, not physically.

Instead, he watches as Bart collapses in front of him, blood flowing already from his shoulder as his speedster metabolism kicks in, causing faster bleeding.

And something inside of Tim shatters.

## **I don't have much caring left to give**

Cissie moves forward to grab Bart, leaving Kon to fall into Cassie's arms.

And when Lex moves to aim the gun at her instead, Tim lunges.

Grabbing onto skin, Lex's ankle to be precise, Tim relishes in the astonished blink Lex gives, the way that he doesn't seem to comprehend Tim's presence or the grip in his ankle.

Tim doesn't give him that time.

Instead, his feet still in the water, Tim pulls.

Tim and Lex both go down, into the pond as Lex tries to struggle, glaring at Tim and still holding that damned gun.

Tim relishes in the feeling of ripping it out of Lex's hands, claws raking delicately over his skin and leaving thin, red streaks that slowly float upward in the dark waters.

That's when Lex actually looks at him, eyes meeting Tim's and seeing the wide, open smile that Tim's lips have turned into.

That's when he realises that he's made a mistake.

He struggles harder, trying to use his natural buoyancy to his advantage before Tim drags him down and down and further down until Tim can't see the sunlight reflecting on the top of the pond's surface.

He should be shocked that this happened.

He should be horrified that he just grabbed someone.

He should be. He should be. He should be.

What he is, is angry, a hiss at the back of his throat that Tim doesn't bother to stop as he drags Luthor along.

Down one hallway.

Then another.

A right.

A middle.

A right. Left. Middle. Right. Right. Middle. Left.

The tunnels under Gotham are a maze of hallways, caverns, air pockets and dead ends.

Nobody but Tim would be able to navigate it.

And especially not Luthor.

Tim stops at one of the deepest caverns, more than half-filled with water with a limited air supply.

He pulls Luthor to the surface and interrupts when he makes to ask a question.

“You made a mistake” Tim states, an unnatural hiss in his voice that echoes in the cavern.

“You made the mistake of harming my friends” Tim elaborates, pulling his hand away as Luthor’s eyes widen, leaving him to keep himself afloat.

“And you...are going to pay for it” Tim finishes, watching Lex Luthor kick underwater to keep himself afloat, breathing heavily.

“Now, we’re in one of the underwater tunnels under Gotham. There are hundreds of them. Not all of them have air pockets. Not all of them have exits.

If you try to leave this area, this air pocket, you will die.

And I will send your loving sister Lena the corpse with explicit instructions on what to do with it. Or I may leave the burial up to Kon.

Right now, Kon might just fly you out to space and leave you there” Tim explains, watching realisation dawn on Lex’s face.

He’s at Tim’s mercy here.

And right now, Tim isn’t feeling very merciful.

“You have maybe a few hours’ oxygen in here” Tim observes, looking around the size of the cavern and estimating how much air would be in there.

“Seeing as humans use liters of air in minutes, I recommend you be conservative in your oxygen intake.

I don’t intend to come back for a while.

And nobody else will find you in time

You better hope the Bat's 'No killing rule' sticks after what you did" Tim says, slowly sinking into the water until only his eyes are visible over the surface of the water.

He sinks as he takes in Lex's struggling. Struggling to stay afloat. Legs kicking desperately as he likely tries to think of a way out of this situation.

On his way past, Tim tugs on Lex's calf, making sure to press claws against skin and relishes in the way Lex curses as he swallows a mouthful of water.

The way back up is almost as angry as Tim is, seaweed floating erratically as the currents swirl and the water above ripples with the force of Tim's anger and the pond's.

Breaking the surface of the pond makes the waves even more erratic, lapping at the bank with ferocity and choppiness that a pond never sees.

And that isn't all Tim sees at the surface.

Jason's staring at him with wide eyes, Cissie takes a physical step back and Bart actually screams.

But that isn't what draws Tim's attention.

It's the mass of heroes standing at the bank, filling the tiny clearing to the brim.

"Well" Tim starts, staring at Superman and Wonder Woman with wide eyes "Shit"

## Aftermath

“Tim?” Jason asks, voice dumbfounded.

“Yeah” Tim hesitantly draws out.

“What the fuck?” Jason asks after a moment of silence.

Tim opens his mouth, mind whirring for an explanation that he doesn't have.

“No. You know what. Nevermind. I don't want to know” Jason says a moment later, shaking his head, helmet shoved under his arm as he narrows his eyes at Tim.

“I should've called them sooner” Jason mutters, drawing a sound of offense from Bart, even as Bart stares at Tim in horrified fascination.

“You” Tim says in realization, turning his head to Jason as he flinches back.

“You sicced them on me” Tim says, remembering this morning, when he'd been questioning who invited the Titans to the tower. Before this whole mess.

Jason blinks, looking confused. But Tim knows.

“Tim. Yes! I called your friends when you started doing 12 hour patrols and not eating and, you know, staring at every water source like you wanted to sleep in it!” Jason exclaims, flailing his arms around like he can't believe Tim's asking about that.

“Yeah well-” Tim starts, only to be interrupted when a figure stumbles past some of the closest league members, closer to Tim.

“Hm. Well that's a sight. You mind dialing down the murder vibes?” John Constantine asks, a cigarette in his mouth and an unimpressed expression on his face as he looks at Tim.

Tim's eyes narrow and Constantine laughs at him “I've seen worse than you can ever manage, kid” he states, ashing his cigarette on the foliage around Tim's pond in a way that makes a low hiss rumble past Tim's throat.

Constantine just raises an eyebrow at the sound, even as most of the league steps back.

“So. Luthor still alive down there?” Constantine asks nonchalantly, ignoring the hissing and the horrified looks around them.

Tim almost wants to scoff. What does Constantine think he is?

Wait. Actually. What DOES Constantine think he is?

Tim tilts his head, feeling wet strands of hair tickle his neck as he stares at Constantine.

“He’s alive. Left him in an air pocket to tread water for a few hours. Should teach him a lesson” Tim states, smile widening as he remembers the panicked look in Luthor’s eyes.

Just for a moment, before Tim remembers what lesson Luthor is supposed to learn.

Bart.

“Is Bart OK? Is Kon OK? Where’s Cissie?” Tim asks, eyes widening as he glances around the clearing, trying to catch a glimpse of his friends.

“We’re Good, Rob” Kon’s hesitant voice says, leaning to the side just enough to be seen behind Clark.

“Bart’s already healed. Cissie wasn’t even injured and they took the Kryptonite away” Kon explains, slowly starting to walk forward, stumbling his way past Clark and Diana with Cassie’s help, even as she stares at Tim in fascinated horror.

“Yeah. That isn’t the question, Rob. The question is, What the fuck, man?” Bart asks, materializing in front of Tim with a streak of yellow lightning.

Tim blinks, opening his mouth again to attempt to explain. But no words leave his mouth.

Instead, Constantine’s voice filters in again.

“Oh the question really is “What”” Constantine states, eyes still not leaving Tim.

“Call me a what again and I’ll have you join Luthor” Tim states plainly, glaring at Constantine as the waves of the pond ripple again.

Constantine raises another eyebrow, deliberately aching on the edge of Tim’s pond again an earning another hiss. “Yes. Because the hissing, glowing eyes and shroud of mist really do all say “Human”, don’t they?” Constantine asks.

Tim stops then, blinking “I’m sorry. The what?” he asks, head cocking to the side.

“Dude your eyes look like a cat’s. Like. When you shine a flashlight over their eyes in the dark? Like red and reflective?” Kon says, staring at Tim’s eyes in what seems to be a mixture of fascination and horror.

“And are you even kicking? How are you staying afloat?” Bart demands, appearing at the edge of the ponds and peering into the water suspiciously.

Tim's hands twitch at the edge of the bank, fending off the urge to check Bart over and make sure he's OK.

"So what exactly are you then. Siren?" Constantine demands, slowly reaching for Bart to pull him away from the bank, like he's afraid that Tim will grab him and pull him down like he did Luthor.

Tim just rolls his eyes at him.

"Do I look like a winged corpse to you?" Tim demands, slightly offended by that assumption, actually.

Constantine just smiles and says "You never know".

Tim growls at him, no longer bothering to really hide his inhumanity. After all, everyone's already seen and heard everything.

"I'm Russian, Constantine" Tim states, crossing his arms over his chest and waiting.

"Ah. Rusalka. Are we sure Luthor's alive down there?" Constantine asks Clark.

"Hey! Regional differences, Constantine! Some Rusalka were said to bring good harvest" Tim states, remembering some of the old stories his grandmother had told him.

"Nothing's ever that simple" he echoes.

"Of course not. Just like demons don't always claim souls and vampires don't always drink blood" Constantine says sarcastically.

"You're pessimistic. Never had a good experience? Sorry about that. I'm sure you'll find the right one for you some day" Tim snarks back.

"Can someone please explain what the hell is going on?!" Jason yells as Tim and Constantine stare at each other, neither willing to give in.

Tim doesn't turn away.

"Remember when Ra's almost drowned me?" he asks, eyes still locked on Constantine's as most of the league pulls back in shock. Constantine doesn't flinch.

"Yes" Jason states, still sounding annoyed.

"Well. I was drugged and alone. And this gear weighs a ton. So there was no "Almost" involved.

Woke up 2 days later at the bottom of the bay” Tim states.

Silence follows that statement.

“You died?” Jason asks, voice hoarse and laced with something like horrible understanding.

“Yup” Tim says back nonchalantly, trying to stomp out the feeling of guilt.

He never wanted them to find out about this.

“But. But your heart. It’s still beating” Kon interjects, voice desperate as he pushes past Clark again to reach Tim’s side, Cassie, Bart and Cissie at his side, all wide eyes and clenched fists.

They know that Tim wouldn’t lie. Not about this.

Interesting. “It is?” Tim asks, finally turning away from Constantine to look at his friend, who only flinches slightly when he meets Tim’s eyes.

Kon closes his eyes for a moment, breathing deeply before his eyes fixate on Tim’s chest. “Slow but steady. Definitely there” Kon states breathlessly.

Tim falters “Huh” he says a moment later.

Constantine huffs “You’ve been dead how long. And you didn’t even know if you had a heartbeat or not?” he demands, looking slightly more assured by this fact for some reason.

“It’s been almost a month. And excuse me for trying to avoid any realisations about my own mortality” Tim hisses back, still slightly annoyed by the insinuation that he’d drown anyone. Let alone his friends.

“You’ve been dead how long?” Jason asks, voice quiet and horrified, laced with shock.

Tim doesn’t turn to him. Doesn’t want to see the horror and understanding and guilt that he imagines would be on his brother’s face.

Because he and Jason had bonded. They’re brothers now. And Tim doesn’t want to be the cause of Jason’s guilt.

But Jason shocks him, just like he often does, by stumbling to the edge of the pond and meeting Tim’s eyes with his own, no flinch, no fear.



“I’m sorry. I’m sorry I was too late”

## **"We're sorry"**

"It's not your fault" Tim says, voice laced with astonishment, otherworldly echo gone from his voice as he stares at Jason with wide, shocked eyes.

"Oh no. I know it isn't. Just like it wasn't your fault that I died. But...I feel like I should have realised something was up. You've been acting weird for weeks now" Jason explains, eyes still filled with knowledge and guilt and anger.

"Yeah" Tim hums. Head ducking to the side as he looks away from the people on the shore.

Tim swallows roughly around the clog in his throat, hands twitching on the bank of the pond as he tries to ignore the knowledge that they know now. They know what happened. They know what he is.

And Constantine definitely isn't helping.

The man ashes again, this time closer to the pond and to Tim and Tim lets a low hiss escape his throat, causing Jason to stumble backwards, falling onto his ass as he stares at Tim.

"Please don't ash on my space. I don't appreciate it" Tim says, voice sickly sweet and eyes narrowed into what could either be a smile or a sneer.

Constantine just raises an eyebrow, raising the cigarette to his lips again as he continues to stare at Tim.

"Luthor?" he asks and that's when Tim's reminded of the man floating down there somewhere, hopefully scared out of his mind.

"I say we let him stew for a bit" Tim says, ruthless smile on his lips as he speaks.

Constantine raises an eyebrow again, speaking around his cigarette as he says "And how long would that last before he dies?"

Rolling his eyes at Constantine's insistence, Tim sighs "I put him in a cave with more than enough air for a few hours, even if he is forced to swim. And I'll know if he starts to sink" Tim explains finally, feeling his eyes flash, like his eyes refocusing for a moment like a camera.

"I won't let him die" Tim says when Constantine doesn't answer.

When Constantine raises an eyebrow again, Tim huffs in annoyance and turns to Kon.

"You can hear his heartbeat, yeah?" Tim asks.

Kon blinks at being directly acknowledged, eyes locked on Tim's and blinking for a moment before Tim can see focus set into his eyes.

“Yeah. Deep under there. Maybe more into the mainland than the lake? But there” Kon answers a moment later, forehead scrunching like he isn’t sure how to feel about that.

“Thank you” Tim says, turning to Constantine with a gloating look “Please” Tim mocks when Constantine still doesn’t seem convinced. “If I haven’t killed Ra’s yet, what makes you think I’ll kill Luthor. All I’m doing is making it clear that it’s a bad idea to mess with me” Tim smirks.

Constantine tilts his head then, eyeing Tim like he’s trying to see the bloodstains on his teeth.

“Fine. I’ll give you a chance. Just the one, mind you. But if I start finding bodies...” Constantine trails off, eyes making it clear with a flick of his lighter what Tim can expect.

Tim just smirks at him, eyes flashing again and teeth jutting into his lips as Constantine turns around and leaves the clearing, muttering to himself.

That’s when the clearing is enveloped in silence again.

Tim will admit that he had been using Constantine as an avoidance tactic. The man hadn’t seemed that bothered that Tim had died. And, while annoying, he didn’t make Tim feel guilty the way the others had.

And now that he’s gone...Tim has no choice but to face his family...and his friends.

“How?” a wrecked voice asks, closer to the edge of the trees than where Tim can see Bruce standing, frozen and still like a living shadow.

“How did we miss this?” the voice asks again, this time accompanied by a flash of bright blue darting forward, flipping over some of the league in an effort to save time.

Dick.

It’s Dick.

Tim...doesn’t know what to say to that.

Can’t admit that he’d thought the same question, all those weeks ago when he just came back. When he was still trying to sleep in a bed and to keep some form of normalcy.

“It doesn’t change anything” Tim eventually says, gripping the edge of the pond and pulling himself out of the pond, no matter how uncomfortable dry land feels against his skin, no matter how dry his throat is.

It doesn't matter.

None of it matters.

That's what Tim had thought weeks ago, after noticing that nothing had really changed. And that's what he thinks now, even though everything's changed.

They know now.

"What do you mean it doesn't matter?" Bruce's voice asks, the first time Tim has heard him speak since...Hell. Maybe since he died.

After all, Tim has kind of maybe been avoiding the Bats, but Bruce more specifically.

No metas in Gotham.

"I mean it doesn't matter. This changes nothing" Tim snaps, eyes fixed on Bruce's expression, trying to make sense of the stone cold, hard look on his face under the cowl.

"It changes everything, Timbo" Jason says quietly, eyes sad from where Tim can spot them out of the corner of his eye.

"What? Just because I died alone and nobody even noticed?" Tim snaps, turning to Jason with a violent splash.

Silence follows his statement and Tim swallows. That...isn't what he meant to say.

Tim takes a breath "Ok. So tensions are running a bit high. I'm still a bit freaked out. All of us are. So how about this?" Tim bargains.

"I'll go and fetch Luthor. Superman can remove him from the premises and make it clear that if he ever targets my friends, family or city, ever again, I will make him pay for it" Tim offers, meeting Clark's eyes and making his point clear.

"Then, I will take the team and the Bats down to my new nest" Tim stipulates, skin crawling at the idea of having to leave the water "And we'll talk about this".

Clark makes to argue, but Bruce steps forward, hands shaking just enough for Tim to notice from this distance.

"Ok, Tim. Anything you need".

# **It's all over now**

## Chapter Summary

The End

## Chapter Notes

So, here we are again. The end. As always. A new story will be uploaded on Tuesday and for those who enjoyed the Reading Red Robin series, keep an eye on the series. I won't spoil much. Just keep an eye out.

“So. You drowned” Jason states, voice reverberating through the cave that Tim dragged them all down to.

It's Jason, the Bats and the Titans, the league long gone after Tim had brought a shaking and cursing Luthor out of the water and hissed at him to shut him up before he actually leaves him down there.

Jason and the others are situated on a rock surface not unlike the Batcave's, rock jutting out of the water that makes up at least 50% of this “Room”.

There are blankets and computers and even a coffee maker, not that any of it works. The blankets are damp and there's no electricity to fuel anything.

Dick even had to phone Barbara from his comm because it's waterproof and all the non-waterproof electronics had been left at the surface before Tim took them down into the caves.

Tim's the only one still in the water, leaning his crossed arms on a rock and resting his chin on them nonchalantly. Or rather, like he's trying to be nonchalant.

He gives himself away with the fine trembles in the water.

And that's something else Jason had noticed. The water...it reacts to Tim. When he lunged for Luthor, the water had swelled, like it wanted to help him. When he came up angry, the water was choppy, too choppy to be physically possible in a pond of that size.

And now, the water trembles, like a glass of water in the grip of some traumatized child.

“I drowned” Tim states, eyes blank and not seeming to care the slightest bit. Each and every bit as traumatized as he should be, the shakes in the water prove that. But hiding it.

At least when Jason died, when he woke up in his grave, he'd been angry. He'd acknowledged his death with something more than just 2 words.

When Jason died, people knew.

The words came back to Jason now, as if spoken directly into his face "Just because I died alone and nobody even noticed?" Tim had asked. Snapped, really. He was angry. He was scared.

Those were Tim.

This, this blank stare and even voice isn't Tim.

"You fuckin died" Jason states, trying to get a rise from the kid and only causing the Bats and the Titans to flinch back.

Tim doesn't even blink.

"I did"

"And what are you gonna do about it?" Jason demands, the voice in his head, the green, demanding something, anything as retribution.

But Tim doesn't react.

"We blew up his bases. All of them. And Luthor might have suffered less than I'd prefer but-"

"Kid. Do you want them dead?" Jason demands, causing Bruce to wheeze a breath and Tim's eyes to widen.

Tim seems frozen still, like the ice cube he felt like when he'd taken hold of Jason's wrist.

Jason watches closely. Not just Tim but the water that surrounds him.

The water has stopped trembling.

"I don't need you to fight my battles, Jason"

"That's not an answer, Tim"

They stare down for a few more moments and in a flash, an instant, Jason sees what he needs.

The water has stopped trembling and Tim's hands have stopped fidgeting. He isn't frozen in shock. He's relaxed. For probably the first time Jason's seen him since he came up for air after having left Luthor to stew.

"Eh. Well I was already gonna blow him up for daring to come after another Robin. No matter" Jason states and watches Tim's shoulders relax.

"I'm more interested in the caves" Babs states, voice echoing through the cave from Dick's comm, the clacking of keyboard keys in the background "You said they go basically everywhere?"

Tim blinks, eyes shining in the dark as he turns to face Dick, who only jolts a bit when faced with Timmy's new...appearance.

Constantine wasn't kidding when he said that Tim no longer looked human.

With the reflective sheen of his eyes and the black claws tipping his fingers, Tim looks like he came out of a horror movie. The pale skin and shroud of mist that seems to constantly flow over his shoulders only complete the look.

But. He still looks like Tim.

His eyes still narrow in the same way and his head still tilts like a magpie's.

It's just...different now.

Just like Jason's different after what happened to him.

Different.

Like death changes everyone who passes through her realm.

"There's even one to the cave" Jason hears when he tunes back into the conversation, Tim's tone happy and excited.

And Jason falters then.

He hadn't liked talking about his death. No matter how many jokes he made or how many times he held it over the others, even using it to torture them in the beginning. He never talked about it if he could help it, not beyond a sentence.

Tim obviously doesn't want to talk about it. Doesn't want to talk about how he felt and how he came back and how nobody fucking noticed.

And Barbara seems to know that, steering the conversation into a completely new direction.

But Jason has all the information that he needs.

Has all the motivation required.

The Al Ghul's are going to suffer.

Because Jason was supposed to be the last.

"No more dead Robins" Jason mutters too low for anyone but the Kryptonian to hear, eyes gleaming green as Tim's reflect red.

Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!